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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 MUSCAT 000004

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [IR](#) [MU](#)

SUBJECT: SULTAN'S MESSAGE TO IRAN: INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY
WON'T TOLERATE MISBEHAVIOR

REF: 08 MUSCAT 0849 (NOTAL)

Classified By: Ambassador Gary A. Grappo for reason 1.4 (B and D).

Summary

¶1. (C) Oman's Special Advisor to the Sultan for Cultural, Affairs Abdul 'Aziz al-Rowas, was dispatched by Sultan Qaboos to Tehran on December 15, 2008 (reftel) to deliver a surprisingly blunt message to the Iranian leadership. In a meeting with the Ambassador January 3, the once powerful Information Minister and occasional special envoy to Iran said he told Iranian President Mahmud Ahmadinejad that the world will not tolerate Iranian attempts to "disrupt international or regional stability" or interfere in Iraq. In addition, he advised Tehran to "stay out of Palestine" unless it is willing to play a constructive role in bringing about Arab-Israeli peace. Finally, he reportedly told Tehran that Iran would be mistaken to think that America was weakened by the current economic crisis. The Americans still have the wherewithal "to make life for you unbearable," he warned. Instead, he encouraged the Iranians to consider a new approach in dealing with the new American administration. Al-Rowas' visit and message were allegedly unrelated to the GCC Summit, which occurred December 29-30, and Ahmadinejad's attendance of last year's summit in Doha. End summary.

Not So Subtle Message from a Quiet Neighbor

¶2. (C) Al-Rowas, who last visited Tehran shortly after Ahmadinejad's 2005 election victory, told the Ambassador that this visit had a simple purpose) to share the Sultan's observations of the region and offer suggestions from a "good and friendly neighbor." The Iranians continue to show great trust and confidence in Oman and the Sultan and, because of Oman's particularly close relationship with the U.S. and the West, maintain considerable interest in Oman's views of regional matters, according to al-Rowas.

¶3. (C) In his meeting with Ahmadinejad that was "three times as long as scheduled," al-Rowas delivered a simple, "practical" but blunt message to the Iranian president. (Note: He also met separately with Iranian FM Motaki but no other senior Iranian official.)

-- Iran has not been an agent for stability, either internationally or regionally. Iran must know that the international community will not accept international instability. Al-Rowas specifically referred to Iraq and warned that as the Iraqis begin reconstruction and reconciliation in earnest, Iran must cease all interference.

-- On the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, Iran should "stay out of Palestine" unless it wishes to play a more constructive role. Arabs want peace and will support what the

Palestinians want. Iran should not try to address its problems with Israel by supporting Palestinian elements opposed to peace, such as Hamas. When Ahmadinejad referred to Zionism as "a cancer on the world," al-Rowas responded, "Zionism is an idea and you can't fight an idea with the Revolutionary Guard; you need a better idea."

-- Finally, Iranians should not think that the current global economic crisis is an opportunity for mischief-making against the West or the U.S. "The Americans have a storehouse full of military, economic and political weapons to make life for you unbearable." Instead, he encouraged Tehran to take advantage of the opportunity of a new U.S. administration and consider a new approach to dealing with the U.S. He told them to review carefully the "language of change" of the President-elect.

Iran: We Want No Enemies, Just Our Rights

¶4. (C) Al-Rowas said that Ahmadinejad listened patiently and quietly to his message, interrupting only once to offer his interjection on Zionism. After the Omani had delivered his remarks, the Iranian president thanked the Sultan for his frank and helpful observations and advice, which "we value highly." He said that Iran did not seek to provoke instability anywhere and genuinely wanted peaceful relations with everyone, including the U.S. In fact, he reportedly insisted, Iran has been the victim of a Western effort led by the U.S. to deny it its basic rights, i.e., peaceful nuclear energy. (Note: Al-Rowas was quick to comment to the Ambassador that in his message to the Iranians, he had

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purposely not raised the matter of Iran's nuclear program.)

¶5. (C) Iran, claimed the Iranian president, was being singled out by the West as part of "the axis of evil" when, in fact, it had sought to cooperate with the U.S., citing as examples, the Gulf War following Iraq's invasion of Kuwait, the U.S. attack against Al Qa'ida and the Taliban in Afghanistan in 2001-2003, and even the U.S. invasion of Iraq in 2003. The U.S. had never acknowledged those efforts. Moreover, he accused the U.S. of orchestrating a campaign to promote distrust and fear of Iran among GCC countries. Iran, Ahmadinejad claimed, had no antagonistic intentions toward its Arab neighbors, repeating a claim made publicly at the 2007 GCC summit in Doha.

They'll Think about It

¶6. (C) Asked to assess the impact of his remarks on the Iranians, al-Rowas shrugged his shoulders, "After all these years, I still can't read them." Nevertheless, he said, they seemed to listen earnestly and did not argue with the advice. He said that they repeatedly expressed their "great confidence and trust" in Sultan Qaboos and did finally agree to "consider what the Sultan has said." Al-Rowas opined that Ahmadinejad's advisors appeared aware of the opportunities for a new approach with the incoming new administration in Washington but stopped short of signaling possible action. Also, the Omani advised that the Iranians continue to see the Sultan and Oman as a potentially useful mediator with both the U.S. and the GCC.

Ahmadinejad Tired but in Control, Worried about Pakistan

¶7. (C) Al-Rowas reported that the Iranian president looked very tired. He said he had just come back from speaking to a large group of students at a nearby university and commented that "perhaps they had been tough on him." His advisors had later related their concerns about Pakistan in the wake of the Mumbai attacks and fears of further instability there, especially if India takes military action. "They are following Pakistan very closely," said al-Rowas, "and seemed as concerned about the issue as the rest of us."

18. (C) He assessed that Ahmadinejad had "sorted out his problems" with the Supreme Leader and was now firmly in control of the government. He half jokingly offered that when the Iranian president had had visions of and conversed with the Mehdi, it probably had left the Supreme Leader wondering where he fit in since "the president had decided to go around" the Supreme Leader. Al-Rowas would not comment on prospects for the Iranian presidential elections in the spring.

Comment

19. (C) The directness and bluntness of the Omani message are uncharacteristic of the otherwise cautious, respectful and diplomatic Omanis. However, al-Rowas' comments to the Ambassador suggest that the Sultan may have been motivated by a couple of reasons. First, the visit of Central Command Commander Petraeus to Muscat in late November may have had a politically salutary and even sobering effect on the Sultan's thinking about Oman's neighbor to the North and its trouble-making in the region. (Note: General Petraeus met with the Sultan for three hours during the visit, an exceptionally long audience for any visiting foreign official.) If so, the Sultan chose to exercise his special access to the Iranian leadership to share his concerns. Moreover, Tehran would have known that a message from Qaboos -- and especially one as tough as this apparently was -- would come only through al-Rowas (and not from Minister Responsible for Foreign Affairs Yusef bin Alawi). Second, it may be that Oman sees an opportunity for improvement in U.S.-Iran relations and, therefore, is attempting to soften up Tehran in hopeful preparation of the new administration's approach.
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